

The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education



**9/11—Reflecting on Our Social
Condition**

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9/11 Reflecting on Our Social Condition

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Jim Edwards is the Director/Chief Curator for the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. A native Californian, Edwards spent 18 years as a Curator in Texas. He recently curated The Menil Collection's (Houston) exhibition "Pop Art: U.S./U.K. Connections, 1956 - 1966." For the San Antonio Museum of Art his exhibitions include "The Poetic Object" (1989) and "The Perfect World: In Contemporary Texas Art" (1991). For the Fine Arts Museum, The Museums of New Mexico, he curated two retrospective exhibitions; "Doris Cross: ReWorks" (1993) and "Sam Scott: An American Painter" (1997). Edwards is married to Victoria Mikulewicz, and they have three college-aged daughters: Kelcey, Alicia and Celeste.

Mike Emme is an Associate Professor in the Dept. of Elementary Education, University of Alberta, Canada. He is the Caucus co-ordinator for 2001-2003.

Dr. Laura Felleman Fatall is the author of *The Antiques Roadshow*.

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Edgar Heap of Birds: For the past decade, Heap of Birds has explored the stylistic and iconic affinities between indigenous art forms across the globe. Through the work of native and African artists Eagles Speak explore the relationship between the art and culture of indigenous Rhode Islanders and visual expressions from Africa.

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Esther Parada is Professor of Photography in the School of Art & Design, University of Illinois at Chicago. Her writings on photography and cultural politics have appeared in *Afterimage*, *Exposure*, *Aperture*, and the *Michigan Quarterly Review*; and her photographs have been published in numerous journals and books including *Art in America*, *Leonardo*, *Feminist Studies*, *The Art of Photography* (from the Time-Life Photography series), *Iterations: The New Image*, (1993, International Center of Photography with MIT Press), *History of Women Photographers* (1994, Abbeville Press), *A World History of Photography* (Abbeville Press, 1996), and *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies*, (1996, Temple University Press). Recipient of National Endowment for the Arts Photography Fellowships in 1982 and 1988, as well as a Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe College in 1997-98, she has exhibited extensively in the United States, Latin America, and Europe. Her work is represented in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.

Editorial : At Long Last A Moment of Silence

jan jagodzinski

This year's journal finds many of its authors in a reflective moment, affected by the still radiating and lingering pulsating light of 9/11. The journal pays respect to the tragedy of that event and the suffering that ensued through its cover design. As caucus members, we acknowledge the magnitude of the event in the way that our lives have been affected by the many horrific images that remain forever embedded as part of America's cultural memory. Besides my own mediation on the imagery of 9/11 from a Lacanian and Deleuzian perspective ("The Last Shard Standing"), Jim Edwards in, "Tagging a Boxcar," reflects on his motor journey through the Nevada desert the day after 9/11. His meditation on Inuit art, rock art and graffiti boxcars he sees as he is driving, raises questions of the human need for mark making. As he notes, "art" as interpreted from a Western perspective is *not* needed by saints and the totally insane. For the saint all things are possessed by an animism that is perceived as "art." For the insane, art's categorical specificity seems to vanish. In this regard, his meditation both complements and contrasts Laura Fatall's reflection on the educational potential of the "Antiques Roadshow." Again, defying the common acceptable categorizations of art, Fatall argues how such readily accessible artifacts can be a rich source of history and cultural richness. They can be explored for their educational potential.

Other author's obliquely seed their reference to 9/11 as they engage questions of art's power to transform lives. Future Akins in "Miss, Miss, Look What My Mother Sent Me from Jail," takes us back to the junior high classroom to remind us—as educators committed to social change—of the importance of cultural diversity. Our sensitivity to differences, and the need to re-write signifiers which label and hold us hostage to stereotypes is an interminable task. Community and co-operation also characterize Angela La Porte's social activism in New York City's Harlem district. "Intergenerational Art Education: Building Community in Harlem," discusses her research as a participant observer. Hispanic and African American teenagers collected oral histories of volunteer senior citizens discussions about culturally and historically relevant artwork. Such collaboration resulted in collages based on these histories which, in turn, facilitated a greater intergenerational appreciation, reduced age-related stereotypes, and provided a learning environment which fostered a sense of community. In a similar mood of critical reflection, Esther Parada's eloquent essay, "When the Bough Breaks: Loss of Tradition in Urban Landscape," raises our ecological consciousness to reconsider the symbolism and cultural capital of the Elm within American history. A well-known photographer and writer of cultural politics, Parada leaves us with the complexity of contradictory discourses which compete for the Elm's symbolic signification.

Such reflective moments, however, were slow to emerge after 9/11. We seem to live in a society which is shock-proof. Rather than a feeling of outright numbness and silence, the airwaves were filled with noise, much of it directed against the Arab world. The fall of the World Trade Center viewed on any number of television sets was a sight/cite/site we had seen before in countless Hollywood films. CNN seemed to reinforce the nation's disbelief that such an atrocity had happened by continually recycling the imagery of the towers being struck over and over again. The image in our minds became emotionally

inured. One wonders whether the media treated the event as an aesthetic opportunity rather than a moral challenge to ask some tough questions about America's foreign policies? In this regard, a number of the essays deal with the importance of understanding the media images that engulf our lives. Mike Emme's brilliantly insightful essay, "Critical Creativity: On the Convergence of Medium Education and Media Education," makes the crucial point through an absolutely charming story about his son's encounter with the Mutant Ninja Turtles cartoon regarding the complexity of media reception and the need for critical reflection. We are hardly the 'dupes' of media. Rather, there are countless ethnographic studies that point to complexities of interpretation and internalization of popular culture. Emme develops both a differentiation as well as a coalescence between media and the mediums that dominate art education. He calls on a critical and creative engagement with media by art educators. Paul Duncum answers this call with "Wrestling with TV 'Rasslin.'" TV wrestling stretches the envelope as to what art educators presently consider to be the legitimate content of visual culture. Yet, it is precisely the critical analysis of such postmodern spectacularity which the field needs to explore. In contrast to the "needs and gratifications" approach to media literacy which held the field until the early 80s, Duncum recognizes the need to study media from a cultural studies perspective. TV wrestling is critiqued for its racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and familial dysfunction, as well as its anarchy and obscenity.

Violence is no stranger to a globalized society. 9/11 made terrorism a household word. The award-winning design for the memorial will be two beams of light projected into the night sky—a palimpsest reminder of the twin towers. Cultural memories are crucial for identity. They are reminders of a nation's resolve. Edgar Heap of Birds commemorates the resolve of the Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) who were massacred by Colonel George Custer, by honoring Moving Behind, a

fourteen year old Tsistsistas woman survivor who grew up to become a respected elder and leader. His art (several pieces are included in the essay, "Heads Above Grass") continue to trouble accepted official history by raising uncomfortable questions that refuse to go away. Like the haunt of those 6000 lost souls at the site/cite/sight of 9/11 who demand justice before they can rest in peace, Edgar Heap of Birds, as artist, keeps vigil and insists through his art that justice for past atrocities be answered. And, it is the question of justice which haunts the last essay in this collection. A cacophony of voices, Dennis Fehr, Ed Check, Future Akins and Karen Kiefer-Boyd document the canceling of a panel called "Sexual Identities and the Art Classroom" by an administrator at a state art education annual conference. "Canceling the Queers: Activism in Art Education Conference Planning" is a memorial of sorts as well. The voices insist on justice, some cry out in the pain of having their identity "canceled," so as to feel less than human, without a full accord of rights. The violence of structural homophobia both silences and creates a climate of anger. To break that silence becomes a struggle to regain dignity and one's identity. As one author reflects, the massive gravesite in New York City known as "ground zero" also describes the place that gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered youth experience in schools.

Art after 9/11? Is there enough distance now to make it possible? Could its horror ever be represented without falling into a barbarism of one sort or another? For all the praise it received, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* was still too pretty. Many years passed before Holocaust survivors were able to find adequate artistic forms (like Art Spiegelman's *Maus II* that Emme mentions in his essay) to cope with what they had witnessed or were finally able to reimagine. No "art" can appear about 9/11 in this journal, or any other as yet. Not even Art Guagliumi's cover design which, ever so gently touches and then *backs away* from the subject it wants to represent.